23.9.37.V.

ON THE PERPETUITY OF THE GOSPEL-DISPENSATION.

1490.a.42

A

SERMON,

Preached before

The SOCIETY in SCOTLAND for propagating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

At their Anniverſary Meeting,

In the HIGH CHURCH of EDINBURGH,

On Friday, June 5. 1778,

And printed at their deſire.

By JOHN M'FARLAN, D. D.

One of the Miniſters of Canongate, Edinburgh.

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SEP

Edinburgh, 8th June 1778.

At a general meeting of the Society in Scotland for propagating Chriſtian knowledge,

ORDERED,

That the thanks of this Society be given to the Reverend Doctor John Macfarlan, for his excellent ſermon preached this day before them; and that he be deſired to permit the ſame to be printed for the uſe of the Society.

JAMES FORREST, Clerk.

At a general meeting of the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge,

ORDERED,

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JAMES FORREST, Clerk.

A

SERMON.

Matthew xvi. 13——18.

Jeſus aſked his diſciples, Whom ſay ye that I am? Simon Peter anſwered, Thou art Chriſt, the Son of the living God. Jeſus ſaid, Upon this Rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it.

THE goſpel-diſpenſation appears to have been the great deſign of Eternal Wiſdom before the foundation of the world. Man had no ſooner fallen from that happy ſtate in which he was at firſt placed, than the promiſe of a Saviour was given. This promiſe was renewed to Abraham, to Moſes,

ſes, and to the Prophets, in almoſt a continued ſucceſſion, through various ages. The perpetuity of this diſpenſation, and of the Meſſiah's kingdom, was alſo declared from antient times. It was foretold by David. When prophecying of our Saviour, he ſaith, 'His name ſhall endure *for ever*. His name 'ſhall be continued as long as the ſun *.' Thus alſo Iſaiah declares concerning him: 'Unto us a Son is given, and the govern-'ment ſhall be upon his ſhoulder; of the 'increaſe of his government and peace there 'ſhall be no end †.' It was, if poſſible, yet more clearly foretold by Daniel, when ſpeaking of thoſe mighty empires which ſhould ariſe, but which, in the common revolution of ſublunary events, ſhould be deſtroyed and come to nought: 'I ſaw,' ſaid he, 'in the night viſions, and behold, 'one like the SON OF MAN came with the 'clouds of heaven, and came to the antient 'of days, and they brought him near before 'him:

* Pſ. lxxii. 17. † Iſaiah ix. 6. 7.

'him: And there was given him dominion,
'and glory, and a kingdom, that all people,
'nations, and languages ſhould ſerve him;
'his dominion is an *everlaſting* dominion,
'which *ſhall not paſs away*, and his king-
'dom that which *ſhall not be deſtroyed* *.'
In the words we have now read, our Lord confirms, by his own authority, this truth contained in antient prophecy, 'I *will* build 'my church, and the gates of hell ſhall not 'prevail againſt it.'

This paſſage has been differently explained by learned men. Though I will not enter into the field of controverſy, or of minute critical inveſtigation; yet, to clear the way for what I ſhall afterwards deliver, it is neceſſary to give that interpretation which to me ſeems moſt agreeable to the ſpirit of the paſſage, and of other parallel texts.

From the miracles which Jeſus had wrought, it appears there was, at this time, a variety of opinions concerning him. 'Some 'ſaid

* Daniel vii. 13, 14.

'ſaid that he was John the Baptiſt, ſome 'Elias, others Jeremias, or one of the pro-'phets.' Our Lord, probably to try his diſciples, ſaid, 'But whom ſay ye that I am?' Ye have had a better opportunity than the world of ſeeing my miracles, and of hearing the truths which I have declared. Simon Peter anſwered, 'Thou art Chriſt, the Son 'of the living God.' Thou art the great anointed King of thy people; the only begotten of the Father; much more nearly allied to the Divinity than any prophet, however great, that has ever appeared on earth. This is, indeed, the great fundamental truth on which the whole of the Chriſtian religion is built. 'Other foundation can no man lay 'than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt *.' Upon this confeſſion, Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto him, 'Bleſſed art thou, Simon Bar-'jona; for fleſh and blood hath not revealed 'it unto thee, but my Father which is in 'Heaven.' Thou art bleſſed, or highly favoured;

* 1 Cor. iii. 11.

voured; for thou haſt received the knowledge of this great truth, not by fleſh and blood, not by any human means, but by immediate inſpiration from God. 'Thou 'art Peter, and on this rock I will build my 'church.' Though the word *Peter* in the Greek, and *Cephas* in the Syriac, ſignify a *rock* or *ſtone*; yet we cannot believe that it was on his name that the church of Chriſt was to be founded. This would have been a conceit unworthy of the dignity and ſimplicity of the goſpel. Nor was it *by* Peter. It is not ſaid ſo. Neither the words, nor the hiſtory afterwards given of this apoſtle, countenance this explanation. For, though Peter was among the firſt who preached the goſpel to the Gentiles, yet Paul wrought 'more abundantly:' He was a more ſucceſsful inſtrument in building the church of Chriſt amongſt them. The words ſpoken by our Lord, therefore, can only refer to Peter's confeſſion, 'That he was the Chriſt, 'the Son of the living God.' Upon this rock, upon this immoveable and eternal truth,

I will build my church, and 'the gates of 'hell ſhall not prevail againſt it. By the *gates*, in the figurative language of the eaſt, was often meant thoſe who ſat in the gates; and theſe were the chief rulers, or magiſtrates of cities, who there diſtributed juſtice to the people. By hell, formerly, was underſtood the ſtate of the dead, or of departed ſpirits. The meaning, then, is, the rulers of the ſtate of the dead, the powers of death and of darkneſs, with their wicked emiſſaries on earth, by all their arts and force, ſhall never prevail againſt my church.

This aſſurance cannot fail to be truly comfortable to every ſincere Chriſtian. Are our hearts warmed with love to God? have we any zeal for the glory of our Saviour, or deſire for the ſalvation of our brethren of mankind? It will then be our moſt earneſt wiſh, and our moſt ardent prayer, that the kingdom of Chriſt may come, that it may increaſe, and that the gates of hell may never prevail againſt it. Yet, when we look around us in the world, we think we can ſee

many

many things which afford juſt cauſe for fear and apprehenſion. Many populous kingdoms are yet covered with darkneſs, and appear determined not to admit the light. Nations who call themſelves Chriſtians, are ſo blinded by abſurd ſuperſtitions, and groſs errors, that they hardly merit the name. And even in theſe countries where the truth ſhines in its purity, what multitudes walk in darkneſs! Though vice and profanity have been but too common in all ages, yet now, more daring than formerly, they do not ſkulk as aſhamed, but triumph in open day. Numbers of the righteous, whom we regarded as pillars of the truth, are taken away, while few appear riſing to ſupply their place. The love of many ſeems to wax cold, while indifference and infidelity abound more and more. When we view this dark ſide of things, we are tempted to fear, that God, in anger, has given up mankind to the evil imaginations of their hearts, and that, ere long, the light of the goſpel will be wholly extinguiſhed on the earth.

But, under all theſe deſponding fears, let us look to the promiſes of God, and upon them let us reſt our hope. He hath ſaid, that 'the 'gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt' his church; that he will be 'with' his people 'alway, even to the end of the world;' and what he hath ſpoken muſt ſtand faſt: There is nothing on which we may ſo certainly depend. 'Heaven and earth *may* paſs away, 'but his words *cannot* paſs away.'

It will then be a ſubject, both uſeful and agreeable, in the 1*ſt* place, to ſhow, That, as the goſpel-diſpenſation is the work of God, ſo the counſels of men, combined with the powers of darkneſs, could not prevent its progreſs, and ſhall never be able to prevail againſt it. I ſhall then, in the 2*d* place, conſider what is now required of us as Chriſtians, to advance the kingdom of Chriſt, or to promote the intereſts of religion. I ſhall,

'1*ſt*, Endeavour to ſhow, that, as the goſpel-diſpenſation is the work of God, ſo the counſels of men, combined with the powers

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of darkneſs, could not prevent its progreſs, and ſhall never prevail againſt it.

In general, the perpetuity of this diſpenſation might be hoped for, from a conſideration of its nature, namely, of its internal excellency; and that it is formed by infinite wiſdom, for mankind in every age, country, and circumſtance, in which they may be placed.

It contains a compleat ſyſtem of the pureſt doctrines and precepts which ever were publiſhed to mankind. In it we have clearly held forth to us thoſe great truths which are of the utmoſt importance to our happineſs, but which we, of ourſelves, never could have diſcovered. While it ſhows us our alienation from God by ſin, it directs us to a Mediator, through whom alone we can be reconciled; and, while it makes known to us our divine original, it opens to us the proſpect of life and immortality beyond the grave. It is no leſs admirable for its ſimplicity. From two great principles, love to God and love to mankind, it unfolds to us

the nature of every duty which we owe either to our Creator, or our fellow-creatures. There is no room for the ſmalleſt perplexity or doubt, with regard to practice. While it affords ample ſubject of thought to the deepeſt reaſoner, it is accommodated to the weakeſt underſtandings; calculated to make the ſimple wiſe. In theſe reſpects, it is not only ſuperior to all the boaſted inventions of men, but even to the revelations given by God in former ages. The patriarchal diſpenſation was accommodated to the ſimplicity of thoſe early times. Then each venerable father, ſitting in his tent, or under the ſhade of a tree, taught his children and family the truths which he had received by tradition from his fathers, and inſtructed them in the duties which they owed to God, and to one another. Their religious rites were few and ſimple. They adored one God, and offered up in ſacrifice to him the firſt fruits of their fields, and the firſtlings of their folds; thus expreſſing the ſenſe which they had of their dependence on his mercy, and their

their grateful acknowledgment of his bounty. But, when mankind increaſed in numbers, many corruptions crept in amongſt them. The pure and ſimple religion of the fathers was ſucceeded by idolatry and vice. A new law, therefore, became neceſſary, to reſtrain theſe corruptions, and to keep alive on the earth the knowledge of the true God. This law was given by Moſes; but, from its nature, it plainly appears to have been accommodated to one people only, and to them placed in particular circumſtances, promulgated chiefly to preſerve the oracles of God, and to prepare the world for the reception of the Meſſiah. When it had anſwered theſe ends, it was no longer neceſſary. But, as the Chriſtian-diſpenſation was the grand deſign of providence from the beginning, ſo it was calculated for all ſucceeding ages. The kingdoms of this world are in a continued ſtate of fluctuation. Thoſe mighty empires, which, formed in a manner of braſs and of iron, promiſed perpetuity, have fallen to decay, and left no veſtiges of their

boaſted

boaſted glory. But, while the works of men, like themſelves, are imperfect, and daily periſhing, this work, worthy of its divine Author, is compleat, and ſhall be eternal: It is 'a kingdom which cannot be moved,' which is everlaſting, which ſhall continue while the ſun endures.

Having premiſed thus far in general, I proceed more particularly to ſhow, That this is the work of God, which the counſels of men could not prevent, and which they cannot deſtroy. In the

1ſt place, This diſpenſation is the work of God. The edifice was raiſed, not by human means, but by the particular interpoſition of divine power. It is truly 'the doing 'of the Lord, and wonderful in our eyes.' He was the author of it; he firſt laid the great plan of man's redemption. The ſame mighty arm which began, alſo carried on the glorious deſign. It was indeed 'like a 'grain of muſtard-ſeed;' ſmall and imperceptible in its beginnings, but, from that little ſeed, it ſoon ſprung up a mighty tree,

almoſt

almoſt covering the earth with its branches. The means employed for its advancement far exceed all human thought. Had we been to lay the plan for its moſt ſpeedy propagation, the great and the powerful, the wiſe and the learned, would have been the inſtruments we ſhould have employed: And ſuch the great Ruler of the univerſe could have choſen. But the inſtruments ſelected by God for this purpoſe were of an oppoſite character. The veſſels employed to carry the treaſures of the goſpel, were men deſpiſed of the world as poor, weak, and unlearned; yet, by theſe men the goſpel in a ſhort time made the moſt aſtoniſhing progreſs. St Paul, writing on this ſubject, informs us, That what the world accounted 'the fooliſh-'neſs of God, is wiſer than men. For, not 'many wiſe men after the fleſh, not many 'mighty, not many noble, are called: But 'God hath choſen the fooliſh things of the 'world to confound the wiſe; and God hath 'choſen the weak things of the world to 'confound the things which are mighty;

'and

'and baſe things of the world, and things 'which are deſpiſed, hath God choſen; yea, 'and things which are not, to bring to 'nought things that are *.' The reaſon aſſigned for this is, 'That no fleſh ſhould 'glory in his preſence: That your faith 'ſhould ſtand, not in the wiſdom of men, 'but in the power of God †.' Such means being employed, no artifice or favourable combination of circumſtances, could be alledged as the cauſe of its ſucceſs; the whole appeared to be the doing of a higher hand. The gates of hell could not prevail againſt this, which was the deſign of eternal wiſdom, upheld by the arm of Omnipotence.

2*dly*, As this was the work of God, ſo the violence and malignant rage of his enemies could not prevent its progreſs. Tho' 'the heathen raged, and the people ima-'gined vain things; tho' the kings of the 'earth ſet themſelves, and the rulers took 'counſel together againſt the Lord and a-'gainſt

* 1 Cor. i. 25.——29. † Ch. ii. v. 5.

'gainſt his anointed; yet He who ſat in the 'heavens held them in deriſion *.' The goſpel no ſooner appeared than it met with moſt violent oppoſition, and that from a quarter where it was leaſt to be expected. Our Lord 'came to his own, and his own 'received him not.' His goſpel was not only rejected, but perſecuted by the houſe of Iſrael, to whom it was firſt preached. The Jews were not ſatisfied with imbruing their wicked hands in the blood of the Lord of glory, but they purſued, with the moſt unrelenting rage, his innocent and humble followers. Yet their cruelty did not prevent, but, by the order of Providence, evidently tended to accelerate the completion of the great deſign of infinite mercy. It met with a like treatment from the Gentiles. Though the ſocieties of Chriſtians lived in the moſt peaceful retirement, giving no diſturbance, yet their harmleſs lives did not exempt them from the ſlander and malice of their ene-

* Pſalms ii. v. 1, 2, 4.

mies. It would ſeem, that even their virtues rendered them obnoxious to the world. By the purity and ſimplicity of their conduct, they reproached the corrupt and profligate manners of the age in which they lived. Therefore the heathen raged, and the kings of the earth were combined againſt them. They were perſecuted by fire and ſword, by impriſonments, by ſtripes, by tortures, and death: Yet all their united enmity could not ſtop the progreſs of the goſpel. The patience and fortitude with which they ſuffered the cruelleſt torments, raiſed the attention of mankind to inquire into the principles of a religion which could ſo powerfully ſupport the mind; and thus they made converts even in their death. In this ſenſe, they might be ſaid to have 'quenched the violence of 'the fire; to have been made ſtrong out of 'weakneſs;' and, by their ſufferings, to have 'turned to flight the armies of the aliens *.' Hence it has become an obſervation common

* Heb. xi. 34.

mon to a proverb, That the blood of the martyrs was the ſeed of the church.

3*dly*, As the gates of hell could not prevail againſt the church of Chriſt by open violence; ſo neither could they prevail by their ſecret machinations in ſapping the foundation of the truth. This was indeed the moſt ſevere trial which the goſpel had yet met with. Though Chriſtians had ſtood firm under perſecution, maintaining their purity and integrity; yet they did not ſtand with equal firmneſs the trial of proſperity. Eaſe and wealth introduced various corruptions. The teachers of Chriſtianity became more ambitious of power than attentive to the important duties of their ſtation. It ſhould ſeem as if they had been directed by the ſpirits of darkneſs to impoſe on the credulity of mankind, and to bind them in the fetters of ſuperſtition, that their tyranny might be more eaſy and compleat. In a few ages, the ſimple, but noble edifice of the church of Chriſt, was ſo buried under the rubbiſh which prieſtcraft had heaped on it,

that

that its beauty could not be diſcerned. In thoſe days of darkneſs, the gates of hell ſeemed to triumph. But, as the founder of the Chriſtian church upheld it by his all-powerful arm, they could not prevail. God, in his providence, raiſed up men, who, aided by him, were enabled to diſcover the light of truth in the midſt of darkneſs. They were inſpired with courage to expoſe thoſe groſs errors by which the world had been ſo long deceived, and to proclaim to mankind thoſe precious truths which had been ſo long concealed. In a ſhort time this light diffuſed itſelf over many of thoſe countries which had long ſlept under the reign of ſpiritual darkneſs. At the glorious aera of the reformation, ſuperſtition received a wound, which, it is to be hoped, it never will recover. A ſpirit of free inquiry has now become ſo common, that it is only the moſt ignorant, prejudiced, or credulous, who can be impoſed upon by thoſe errors which formerly were almoſt univerſal. In the

4th place, As the powers of darkneſs could not prevail againſt the church of Chriſt, by ſecretly corrupting the truth; ſo neither have they been able to prevail by the open attacks of infidelity. This hoſtile trial of religion came along with that ſpirit of inquiry which, in many reſpects, was favourable to the truth. Men, not ſatisfied with detecting errors, became 'vain in their imaginations,' and daringly pretended to diſcover truths ſuperior to thoſe which God had revealed. To make way for them, they ventured to call in queſtion thoſe events and facts which were the evidences of the truth of religion. Theſe, indeed, they cannot diſprove, but they deny them; becauſe miracles are not again wrought for their converſion. Exerting the whole force of their mind to find objections againſt Chriſtianity, they have ſo far ſucceeded, as to confirm themſelves in infidelity, and to ſeduce ſome of thoſe who have liſtened to their ſophiſtry. Aided by the diſcoveries of revelation, they have been able alſo to produce theories

theories ſuperior to thoſe of the heathen who dwelt in greater darkneſs; but we may venture to affirm, that they have never been able to produce one equal, even in point of morals, to that contained in the goſpel. Now, infidelity ſeems to have ſpent its force; its moſt formidable engines have been employed, and the edifice of truth remains entire. Though, for a while, it appeared to threaten ruin, yet now it ſeems only to have ſtrengthened the foundation of the fabric. It has expoſed the weakneſs of thoſe objections which once appeared unanſwerable, and ſhown, in a fuller light, the excellency of thoſe truths which men pretended to doubt. Like pure gold, it has come from the furnace of trial more refined, and yet undiminiſhed. In this, as in many inſtances, God hath cauſed 'the wickedneſs of the wicked 'to praiſe him,' and the deſigns of his enemies to advance the purpoſes of his glory. In the

X 5*th* place, Though the enemies of the church of Chriſt have not prevailed by the open

open attacks of infidelity, yet now they ſeem to be more ſucceſsful, by diffuſing a ſpirit of diſſipation, of indifference, and inattention, over the minds of mankind, rendering them averſe to every ſubject that is ſerious or good. This appears to be the character of the age in which we live; and it is to be wiſhed there were leſs foundation for the fears of Chriſtians. The univerſal rage for pleaſure, and the increaſe of luxury, ſeem to have enfeebled all the more noble powers of the human mind. They *ſeem* to threaten not only the overthrow of religion, but our deſtruction as a people. Though men, in polite ſociety, do not uſe, ſo openly as formerly, the arms of infidelity, yet they fortify themſelves with the armour of inſenſibility. Multitudes daily appear in every rank of life, who not only diſregard even the form of religion, but who would be more aſhamed to be found in an act of devotion, than in a deed of the baſeſt immorality. Such men are neither to be alarmed by threatenings, nor animated by hope, nor perſuaded by

reaſon.

reaſon. They are, as it were, 'twice dead, 'plucked up by the root.' If this ſpirit continue to increaſe, as for ſome time paſt it has done, may we not juſtly dread the fatal conſequences, that religion and virtue, neglected and forgotten, will be left without a friend? When ſuch ills threaten, it becomes us to mourn; but let us not give way to deſpair. Let us lift up our eyes to him who has built his church, who has hitherto preſerved it, and who has ſaid, that 'the gates 'of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it.' We cannot look into the womb of time, or venture to ſay what thoſe means ſhall be, by which God will work a reformation: But this much we know, that his power and his wiſdom are all ſufficient, that they *can*, and that they *will* remove the moſt deſperate ills. Perhaps the public calamities with which we are now threatened, may be employed by God to rouſe us from that lethargy into which we are fallen. By chaſtiſing us for our ſins, he may open our eyes to that ruin which ſooner or later muſt attend unrepent-

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ed tranſgreſſion. Perhaps, in the midſt of prevailing diſſipation, there may be many thouſands truly good, unknown to us, whom God is raiſing up, and reſerving to revive a ſpirit of religion, to repair the breaches of his church. Thus it happened in a time of great degeneracy in Iſrael. Elijah complained, 'The 'children of Iſrael have broken thy cove- 'nant, thrown down thine altars, and ſlain 'thy prophets with the ſword; and I, even 'I only, am left, and they ſeek my life.' The anſwer given him was, 'Yet I have left 'me ſeven thouſand in Iſrael, all the knees 'which have not bowed unto Baal *.' A reformation did take place, even in that corrupt age. With the firmeſt confidence, then, let us rely upon the Almighty; what he hath declared ſhall undoubtedly be made effectual. His church ſhall yet flouriſh to the end of time, until it become triumphant in heaven, when his people, united under their great head, ſhall, through the ages of eternity,

* 1 Kings xix. 14. 18.

nity, ſing the high praiſes of their God and Saviour.

Having thus far endeavoured to ſhow, that, as the goſpel-diſpenſation is the work of God, ſo the counſels of men, united with the powers of darkneſs, could not prevent its progreſs, and ſhall never prevail againſt it; I proceed to what I propoſed, under the

Second general head of diſcourſe, To conſider what is now required of us as Chriſtians, or to promote the intereſts of religion.

In general, we may obſerve, that, though the church of Chriſt be the peculiar care of its divine author, and cannot be upheld without the Almighty arm; yet it is by ſecondary means that God carries on the great deſigns of his providence. His people, directed by his word or ſpirit, are the inſtruments which he moſt commonly employs to execute the purpoſes of his will on earth. It becomes neceſſary, therefore, to inquire how far it may be in our *power*, and how much it is our *duty*, to be ſubſervient in carrying on the gracious intentions of divine goodneſs.

goodneſs. Particular inſpiration is not now to be expected, nor is it neceſſary; but the means by which we may be uſeful, are pointed out to us in the word of God; and we may, through divine grace, be directed in the execution of them, by that portion of reaſon and underſtanding which God hath conferred on us. In the

1ſt Place, It is in our power to advance the intereſts of religion, by a ſteady adherence to the great doctrines and precepts contained in the goſpel. 'Hold faſt,' ſaid Paul in his directions to Timothy, 'the form of ſound 'words which thou haſt heard of me, in 'faith and in love, which is in Chriſt Jeſus*.' Let us ſteadily adhere to this great fundamental truth, 'That Jeſus is the Chriſt, the 'Son of the living God; that no man co-'meth to the Father but by him; that who-'ſoever believeth on him ſhall not periſh, 'but have everlaſting life; and that every 'man who hath this hope in him, purifieth 'himſelf, even as he is pure.' The inſtabi-

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* 2 Tim. i. 3.

lity of profeſſing Chriſtians is, we have reaſon to fear, one great cauſe of that decay in religion which we now lament. It is not uncommon for men to complain of evils to which they themſelves contribute. Even the infirmities of Chriſtians are, in ſome inſtances, prejudicial to the truth. Let us ſtudy, therefore, to be more and more 'rooted and 'grounded in our faith,' as it may be ſhaken before we are aware. If we do not guard againſt the firſt approaches of infidelity, we may be at laſt entirely 'moved away from 'the hope of the goſpel,' and even others may fall by our defection. On the other hand, by an example of a firm, unſhaken faith, we may hold up thoſe who are in danger of falling. 'Satan,' ſaid our Lord to Peter, 'hath deſired to have thee, that he 'may ſift thee as wheat; but I have prayed 'for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when 'thou art converted, ſtrengthen thy bre-'thren*,' 2*dly*,

* Luke xxii. 31. 32.

2*dly*, It is in our power to advance religion by mingling with ſociety, and ſhowing the influence which Chriſtianity has upon our hearts and lives. Though we ought not to make companions of the profligate and vicious, neither ought we to abſtract ourſelves from the ſociety of thoſe who are of doubtful characters. By this we deprive ourſelves of the opportunity of doing them any good. Our Lord himſelf 'eat with pu-'blicans and ſinners,' and he directed his followers to do the ſame. We do not find that any of the firſt Chriſtians became either monks or hermits; nor does ſuch a recluſe life ſeem agreeable to the ſpirit of the goſpel. Chriſtians formerly were, and ſtill are, as lights ſet up in a dark place; and they are required to 'let their light ſo ſhine before 'men, that they may ſee their good works, 'and glorify their father which is in hea-'ven †.' There is nothing in our power which can have a greater influence on unbelievers,

† Matth. v. 16.

believers, than their ſeeing the lives of Chriſtians as nearly as is poſſible, conformable to their principles, and of courſe, far ſuperior to thoſe of the world. A man who is diſtinguiſhed by purity of life, by an humble frame of mind, by meekneſs, by patience, by gentleneſs, and by brotherly love, cannot fail to win the hearts of all thoſe who are not obdurate in vice. It is ſaid of Julian the apoſtate, that, ſeeing the brotherly affection of Chriſtians, he could not help crying out, with ſome degree of admiration, 'Behold theſe 'Chriſtians, how they love one another!' A perſon, on the other hand, who, profeſſing religion, betrays ſpiritual pride, a ſullen and moroſe temper, a malignant and uncharitable ſpirit, creates in the minds of others a ſtrong prejudice againſt that religion which he profeſſes. If, then, we wiſh to promote the intereſts of religion, let us ſeek more earneſtly after 'the wiſdom that is from a-'bove, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and 'eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good 'fruits, without partiality, and without hy-'pocriſy.'

'pocriſy †.' Then we may hope, that others ſeeing us, may be alſo perſuaded to glorify our Father which is in heaven. But,

3*dly*, While we ſtrive to win men to religion, by exhibiting, in our conduct, the amiable virtues which it recommends, let us be careful that our zeal for religion, which ought to be always warm, be at the ſame time tempered with diſcretion. There is no affection of the mind which requires a more prudent management. Without it we ſhall want ſpirit to do any good; but, when it is miſguided or directed by prejudice or paſſion, it is often attended with the moſt direful conſequences. The hiſtory of all ages furniſhes us with inſtances of its calamitous effects. We muſt take care to be 'zealouſly affected only about a good thing;' that is, about things that are of real importance to faith or practice. It is truly unhappy when men become zealous about matters of ſmall or of no importance. Then they not

† James iii. 7.

not only neglect objects of real concern, but the moſt violent and malignant paſſions are excited about trifles: Yet it is but too common for men to be fervently zealous about ſuch things. Thus the zeal of ſome is employed merely about the particular ſect or ſociety to which they belong, imagining that they only can point out the way to ſalvation. Thus it was, in ſome meaſure, with the diſciples. John ſaid, 'Maſter, we ſaw one 'caſting out devils in thy name, and we for-'bade him, becauſe he followeth not with 'us.' Jeſus checked this narrow ſpirit, ſaying, 'Forbid him not, for he that is not a-'gainſt us is for us †.' There are others who expreſs their zeal by a keen defence of points of mere ſpeculation, or abſtruſe opinions which they do not well underſtand. Such the apoſtle ſeems to have had in view when he exhorts Timothy: 'Charge them 'before the Lord, that they ſtrive not about 'mere words, to no profit, but to the ſub-'verting

† Luke ix. 39. 50.

'verting of the hearers *.' Miſguided zeal alſo paſſes from a deſire to convert, to a deſire to puniſh the unbeliever. Thus, when the Samaritans refuſed to admit our Saviour into their village, James and John ſaid, 'Lord, 'wilt thou that we command fire to come 'down from heaven and conſume them, as 'Elias did. But he rebuked them, and ſaid, 'Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are 'of †.' Farther, we ought to be careful that our zeal be not only free from every malignant paſſion, but accommodated to the times and circumſtances in which we are placed. The ſame bold and fiery ſpirit which was very proper in a rude and half civilized age, would not be ſuitable in an age of greater refinement and knowledge. We muſt be attentive to the manners, to the tempers and habits of mankind. Though we ought not to flatter or indulge the prejudices of the world; yet neither ought we to provoke them to diſguſt: And though we

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* 2 Tim. ii. 14. † Luke ix. 54. 55.

ought not to ſooth them into a falſe ſecurity, yet neither ought we to tempt them to deſpair. Prudence and diſcretion are not the enemies of truth. The great apoſtle of the Gentiles was directed by them. He tells us, 'He was made all things to all men, 'that he might by all means ſave ſome *.' His ſpeech before Agrippa is in a very different ſtrain from his harangue to a popular aſſembly. His example in this is worthy of our imitation. In the

4*th* place, While our zeal is tempered with diſcretion, let us be attentive to the ordinary means by which, under the divine bleſſing, we hope to enlighten, to inſtruct, and to convert our brethren. God at firſt revealed to mankind the great truths of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt; but, before his aſcenſion into heaven, he left this commiſſion with his apoſtles: 'Go ye and teach all nations, bap-'tizing them in the name of the Father, and 'of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt, teach-'ing

* 1 Cor. ix. 22.

'ing them to obſerve all things whatſoever 'I have commanded you; and lo, I am with 'you always, even to the end of the world †.' By this means the goſpel grew mightily, and in a few years was ſpread over the greater part of the known world. Thus has it long ſince viſited this iſle afar off in the ſea, in which we dwell. By the ſame means, it is to be propagated and tranſmitted pure to ſucceeding generations. As mankind never could, of themſelves, have diſcovered the great truths of religion, ſo inſtruction is ſtill neceſſary. It is a very great error to ſuppoſe that, by the exerciſe of their own reaſon, or by any progreſs in human ſcience, they could ever arrive at the knowledge of thoſe important doctrines which the goſpel unfolds. It is indeed written, that, 'whoſoever ſhall 'call upon the name of the Lord, ſhall be 'ſaved.' But the apoſtle to the Romans argues cloſely to the point: 'How ſhall 'they call on him whom they have not be-

'lieved?

† Matth. xxviii. 19. 20.

'lieved? and how ſhall they believe on him 'of whom they have not heard? and how 'ſhall they hear without a teacher †?' It becomes, therefore, one of our moſt important duties, to inſtruct, or to procure the means of religious inſtruction, to thoſe who are yet in ignorance. Our firſt ſervices are due to our children and family, which will not be neglected by any perſon who is a real Chriſtian; Our next ſervices are due to our neighbours and countrymen. Here there is yet much room for the exerciſe of Chriſtian benevolence. There are remote corners in our land, where numbers have no acceſs to the means of religious inſtruction; who live in abſolute ignorance, or are perverted by groſs errors, impoſed on them by a falſe zeal.

If we have any love to our brethren, or any juſt ſenſe of the importance of the knowledge of the goſpel to our own ſalvation, we ſhall do what lies in our power to reſcue them from this deplorable ſtate.

With

† Rom. x. 14.

With this view the SOCIETY for Propagating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE in this country has been inſtituted. It has been formed on a plan the moſt liberal and charitable; with no view to ſerve any ſect or party, but to make known to thoſe who were deſtitute of the means of true knowledge, the great truths of ſalvation in their purity, as they were delivered by our Lord to his apoſtles. Though the Society has, in a great meaſure, ſucceeded in their pious intentions, yet there is almoſt no deſign which *fully* anſwers the ends of its inſtitution. It is impoſſible to find every where proper perſons to diſcharge the duties preſcribed; and when they are moſt faithful, they may be counteracted by thoſe who have a different intereſt in view. But we ought not, on this account, to be diſcouraged in doing good. It is our duty to employ the means which religion and wiſdom direct, patiently truſting in God, that, in his good time, he will render them ſucceſsful. Let us be further encouraged by this conſideration, that, though

we

we do not immediately ſee the full fruit of our labours, yet that good ſeed is ſown which may afterwards produce an abundant increaſe. We may often have cauſe to doubt of the ſucceſs of our worldly ſchemes, which may be defeated by Providence for our good; but, when we are engaged in a work, which we have the authority of revelation to believe is agreeable to the will of heaven, there we have a ſurer foundation for hope.

To be thus inſtrumental in illuminating mankind, and in tranſmitting to ſucceeding generations a revelation fraught with bleſſings to the human race, is ſurely the moſt honourable ſervice in which we can be employed. The appellation which St Paul took for himſelf, and for thoſe engaged in the ſame work, is truly dignifying to human nature. 'We are,' ſaith he, 'labourers toge-'ther with God *.' Again, 'we are am-'baſſadors for Chriſt, as though God did 'beſeech you by us; we, then, as workers 'together

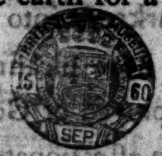
* 1 Cor. iii. 9.

'together with him, beſeech you †.' How animating is the thought, that we, who are leſs than the ſmalleſt grain of duſt, when compared with the other works of creation, may yet be made inſtruments to carry on the great deſign of Eternal Wiſdom, 'to 'call men out of darkneſs into his marvel-'lous light!' And how pleaſing the view, that we may be employed of God, to bring thoſe whom we have affectionately loved on earth, to be heirs with us of that bleſſedneſs which is reſerved for the juſt in heaven! We ought not to be ſoon wearied, or eaſily diſcouraged, when engaged in ſo great a cauſe.

To conclude: While we are duly attentive to employ the means which wiſdom points out, let us never truſt to theſe, as of themſelves they could anſwer the end in view; but let us look up to that God who planted his church, that he would water it with his bleſſing, and render our feeble endeavours

† 2 Cor, v. 20. Ch. vi. 1.

deavours ſubſervient to the great purpoſes of his glory. And, let us be daily earneſt in our prayers, 'That the kingdom of Chriſt 'may come; that it may extend from ſea to 'ſea; that the heathen may be given to the 'Son for an inheritance, and the utmoſt 'lines of the earth for a poſſeſſion.'



The Preſident, Directors, and Officers of the Society for the year 1778.

Thomas Earl of Kinnoul, Preſident of the Society.

Committee of Directors.

David Earl of Leven and Melvill, Preſident.

Rev. John Erſkine, D. D.
Rev. Robert Dick, D. D.
Rev. William Gloag, D. D.
Rev. Robert Henry, D. D.
} Miniſters of Edinburgh.

Robert Wellwood of Garvock, Eſq;
Joſeph Williamſon, Eſq;
} Advocates.

Mr John Walker
Mr William Galloway
Mr Robert Scott-Moncrieff
Mr Charles Wallace
} Merchants in Edinburgh.

Mr William Gray, Bookſeller.

Mr David Ruſſell, Accountant.

Mr John Caw, aſſiſtant Secretary to the Board of Exciſe, Edinburgh.

Mr William Dickſon,

Officers

Officers of the Society.

Alexander Tait, Eſq; one of the Principal Clerks of Seſſion, Secretary.

John Davidſon, Eſq; Writer to the Signet, Treaſurer.

William Galloway, Eſq; Merchant in Edinburgh, Comptroller.

Robert Chalmers, Eſq; Accomptant-General of Exciſe, Accomptant.

Mr James Forreſt, Writer to the Signet, Clerk.

Mr Thomas Boyes, Writer in Edinburgh, Bookholder.

Mr James Brown, Bookſeller.

Alexander Coutts, Beadle.

Annual

Annual and other benefactions are received by the following perſons.

In Edinburgh, by John Davidſon, Eſq; Writer to the Signet, Treaſurer to the Society.

In London, by James Coutts, Eſq; Banker in the Strand;
John Mackintoſh, Eſq; Stock Exchange, Secretary to the Society;
William Fuller, Eſq; and Son, Bankers, Lombard Street.

Form

Form of a Bequeſt or Legacy.

Item, I give and bequeath the ſum of to the Society in Scotland for propagating Chriſtian knowledge, to be applied [to the purpoſes of the firſt or ſecond patent, as the donor pleaſes].—See both patents, p. 54. and 59. of the Account of the Society publiſhed in May 1774.

Thoſe who may be pleaſed to favour this Society with bequeſts or legacies, are intreated to expreſs their intention in the very words above directed; and particularly to take care that the words, *in Scotland*, be not omitted.